

LETTERS

Irreplaceable to Spiritual Life

No issue of *DIALOGUE* is unrewarding or unnourishing, but the fall issue surpassed even your usual high standard. I am constantly hungry to understand how other people experience their religious and spiritual lives, both personally, historically, and in community—not only the facts of what happened but what it meant.

I was refreshed and renewed by the candor of Kevin Jones's faithful struggle with his physical affliction, the tenderness and reverence of Levi Peterson's tribute to his mother, the clarity and charity of Carmon Hardy's reconstruction of the great burden the Church membership took upon itself at the cessation of plural marriage, the steady affirmations of Lowell Bennion, and the lavishly loving story of Phyllis Barber.

DIALOGUE is an irreplaceable component in the spiritual life of the Mormon community.

Lavina Fielding Anderson
Salt Lake City, Utah

Shades of the Medieval Church

It has taken me over a month to simmer down enough to write a reasonably calm letter. Its purpose is to protest the Church's August 23rd condemnation of a paper read at the latest Sunstone Symposium and of intellectuals in general. My husband and I have been married fifty-one years; one of the years before our marriage, Elder Henry D. Moyle spoke at the Washington, D.C. branch we were attending. I remember only one sentence: "When the General Authorities have spoken, your thinking has been done." Shades of the medieval church!

Our daughter Meg, whom we lost to cancer over five years ago, was a contributor to *DIALOGUE* and a participant in the Sunstone Symposia for several years. She was also a faithful Church member, as was her husband, Russell. They decided jointly to accept Russell's call to be bishop of the Kensington Ward during the years she was fighting her cancer war. During that time, she served as Relief Society president and taught an adult class.

I myself have been inactive since the International Women's Year (IWY) conference in 1977. It was the most overwhelming encounter with collective hate I have ever experienced.

My protest is on behalf of Meg and myself. My mother, Leah Ivins Cardon, would be right in there with us.

I just want you to know I am on your side.

Lucybeth Rampton
Salt Lake City, Utah

Published Statement

I have neither heard nor read the speeches given at the August Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City. But I must comment on the statement by Church leaders about such symposia, published in the 24 August 1991 *Deseret News*. It seems that some speakers at the symposium offended Church leaders, who then became displeased with those responsible for the offensive remarks.

The issue here is censorship by intimidation.

Much of Mormonism (history, doctrine, and practice) is off limits for open, honest, and meaningful discussion in a Church setting. Because of this, publica-

tions such as *DIALOGUE* and *Sunstone* and forums such as the Sunstone Symposia have a special appeal to Church members who wish to explore all interesting aspects of their faith.

I had been led to believe that Church leaders tolerated these journals and symposia for the following reasons:

1. They served somewhat as a safety valve for members whose religious needs were not being met in the usual Church setting.
2. They were published/sponsored by Latter-day Saints.
3. Most of the articles and presentations were by Church members.
4. Very few, if any, participants leave the Church.

Evidently I have been wrong. I am now distressed to discover that Church leaders exert considerable pressure on some members who participate in these publications and symposia.

I feel that any public (not Church-sponsored) presentation about Mormonism should be in good taste and should respect the feelings of Church leaders and members. I believe strongly in freedom of speech and freedom of the press. I openly deplore censorship, including censorship by intimidation. With very few exceptions, Mormonism should be open to honest and meaningful discussion.

Reed S. Roberts
Logan, Utah

Adult Points of View

It was a very pleasant surprise to discover and read a couple of issues of *DIALOGUE* (Summer and Fall 1989)—pleasant, because of the quality of the articles, allying scholarship and broad human qualities, and a surprise, because as a recent convert, I'm more used to the prose of the Dutch version of the *Ensign* than to the very adult points of view developed by the various authors in your journal.

I very much appreciate the open-minded approach to subjects I find in

DIALOGUE and long to read more of this kind of literature.

Willy Debandt
Antwerp, Belgium

More on Prayer Language

A misunderstanding about language prevails in the Church. It appeared again in Richard C. Russell's letter to *DIALOGUE* (Summer 1991) and Lavina Fielding Anderson's article "The Grammar of Inequity" (Winter 1990). Church members and leaders sometimes say that we should use "thou," "thee," "thy," and "thine" in our prayers because they are more formal, and therefore more respectful, than "you" and its cases. They are mistaken. "Thou" is the *familiar* second person pronoun; "you," the formal.

Beginning in Middle English, *you*, originally a plural form, came to be used as a mark of polite address to a single person. More and more, the use of *thou* was limited to addressing a person with whom the speaker was familiar or intimate: children, social inferiors, God. . . . Eventually, *you* became the normal singular form, and *thou* was retained only in a few dialects, in some literary styles, and in the religious use. (*The American Heritage Dictionary* 1982, "thou")

For me, "thou" and the other words become special because I use them only in calling on God. The fact that they are obsolete in everyday conversation is a plus; my using them implies that Heavenly Father is my most intimate friend. Yes, it would be a little easier to say "you." But it's worth the extra effort to speak to my Father as intimately as I can.

The reason we always hear for using "thou" is to show humility, respect, and reverence. This isn't totally wrong. Especially where our relationship with God is concerned, these feelings really *equal* love and familiarity. If we humbly revere God, we will know and love him; if we love him, we will honor him. The Savior, for

example, personified reverence and conversed more intimately with God than any other.

Sharon L. Wilson
Logan, Utah

Ethnocentric Saints

I read with interest Marjorie Newton's article on the American socialization of Australian converts (Fall 1991). She writes very well, and I think her article is a good challenge to all of us, but I think the lady "protesteth too much." To make her point, she has collected stories, some of which apply no more to Australians than to Americans, or others. The admonition for all bishops to visit all nonmembers within their ward boundaries applied as vainly to all bishops in big cities everywhere as to those in Australia. The same is true of the "Light the Way to MIA" idea. Moreover, the "dismal record of home and visiting teaching in most Australian wards" is not unique to Australia, or necessarily due to Australian resentment of "imposed relationships" (p. 17). Many American wards, especially where members are widely scattered, have the same record. I have a hard enough time getting my priesthood holders to do their home teaching to families which all live within one hundred yards of each other.

I would also take issue with her discomfort in Church meetings in Utah where much time was spent lauding the importance of the 4th of July. I felt no such discomfort in France when Church members honored the downfall of the Bastille, or in New Zealand when Church members remembered ANZAC Day or Guy Fawkes Day. The consequences of all of these days reach far beyond one country and are important enough to be remembered and honored. The 24th of July is more than just a Utah holiday, and it certainly is not an American holiday. It is a remembrance of brave souls who defied the United States government which would not protect the rights of its citizens.

I wonder if Marjorie Newton's pique is not more of an indication of her own parochial ethnocentrism than a valid criticism of Church practices. Does she seriously believe that any thinking person in the Church would argue that being born outside of the United States is an indication of inferior status in the preexistence or that nationalistic statements of young American missionaries, often teasingly made, properly show their feelings toward Australia?

Early in her article, she states that "no Latter-day Saint would argue with the premise that America is a choice land, a promised land" (p. 10). It seems to me that despite that acknowledgement, she resents the fact. It bothers her that American members of the Church act like Americans. Perhaps, as she argues, it is time for Americans to be less ethnocentric when Church matters are concerned, but she herself concludes that "perhaps none of this has been particularly damaging to the Church in Australia. It has not even been unanimously resisted; many Australian members and leaders do not see any problem at all" (p. 15). Then isn't the "problem" more one of her own making than one of reality, even though we all should be sensitive to the potential harm of perpetuating the conditions that offend her?

In 1938 as a missionary in Korongata, New Zealand, I visited Rangi Puriri, a 105-year-old Maori member of the Church. He was reading the Book of Mormon as I entered his little shack. He lifted up his head and began reciting it from memory. He then went on to say that he knew the Church was true, and he was very grateful to the missionaries who had taken the gospel to his people. He added that many people said that the missionaries were taking advantage of the ignorant Maori, and he resented such statements which implied that because he was a Maori and did not know English, he was ignorant. He was grateful to the missionaries, he said, but the Church did not belong to them. It was as much his church

as theirs, and he knew the gospel as well as they did.

I had a missionary companion, E. Boley Bigler, who had been a football star on a famous Catholic university team. At that university, he had to take religion classes, from which he learned much. In one class on comparative religions, the teacher (a priest) said that the distinctive characteristic of Mormonism was that it allowed each person to be his or her own philosopher. No one had to accept another as infallible.

In 1983 at a mission presidents' conference in Sydney, President Howard W. Hunter advised a mission president that he had been called to solve mission problems and President Hunter was glad not to have the responsibility. That is the way it is in the "corporate church." From Joseph Smith's day until now, members have been expected to think for themselves and not wait to be told what to do. Accepting prophetic guidance does not relieve any member from being personally accountable for his or her actions, and the nation in which one lives has nothing to do with salvation.

Wilford E. Smith
Provo, Utah

Providences

Intellectual history often gives the reasons behind historical actions. Years ago we were told by Klaus Hansen (DIALOGUE, Autumn 1966) that the Mormon pioneers were trying to found their own country out west. This answered a lot of questions I had about the "Trek."

Now we are told by B. Carmon Hardy (Fall 1991) that the Church's reason for suspending polygamy was that God was not at all happy in the manner in which the Saints practiced the art. The membership (or rather the men) had been a little long on lust, and a little short on procreative intent. This reminds me of the reason for giving up the United Order—i.e., that the Saints were a little too selfish to be good communists.

Hardy's self-flagulation theme on polygamy (i.e., that the Mormons weren't righteous enough to practice it properly) is consistent with the earlier world of the New England Puritans out of which Mormonism emerged. The Puritans had what we might call a "group covenant," by the terms of which God gave the covenanting community earthly blessings (or punishments) in exchange for their abiding (or not abiding) his commandments. Thus it followed that when bad times came, the group assumed they had offended God. They gathered together in a mode of "fasting and humiliation" (their term) to promise God their future obedience in exchange for his lifting the Indian attack (or other privation they were enduring).

The analysis got more and more sophisticated: In the early seventeenth century, if a drunk walked down the streets of Boston, the citizenry feared God might send a plague upon the city. A century later, they came to view the drunk as the punishment (rather than as a harbinger of calamities to come). This accent on "providences" is in the writings of scholars such as Harvard's Increase Mather, those of his son Cotton, and even in the diary of Governor John Winthrop (who thought he must have been good because a mole ate through his Book of Common Prayer, but missed the New Testament).

Because of this aspect of mind in the Puritan backdrop to the Mormon movement, I am much inclined to respect Hardy's thesis.

Joseph Jeppson
Woodside, California

Electronic Discussion Group

We would like to announce the creation of MORMON-L, an electronic discussion group for Mormon studies on the BITNET network. This group hopes to provide an open forum for serious discussion of such topics as Mormon history, literature, fine arts, theology, and church life. It is open to all interested individu-

als inside and outside academia, Mormon and non-Mormon alike.

BITNET primarily links academic and research institutions with one another. Because open forums draw heavy traffic that sometimes amounts to little more than casual chitchat, discussions on the MORMON-L will be minimally moderated. Our moderation does not suppress controversial or volatile topics, but rather limits casual chatter and personal attacks. Active evangelism, either pro- or anti-Mormon, is inappropriate. Content or style will never be altered.

To join MORMON-L, you must have access to the BITNET computer communications network. For information regarding computer communications, contact the computer support personnel at your institution or at your local computer store. If

you are affiliated with a university or other large institution, you probably already have potential access to BITNET. If you have no such affiliation, you may be able to send and receive MORMON-L postings through such services as CompuServe.

To subscribe to MORMON-L, send the following message to `LISTSERV@BYUVM`: "Subscribe MORMON-L name," leaving the subject header blank. Your name will then be added to the list.

To communicate directly with the list moderators without having your communication posted to the list itself, contact J. Michael Allen <`HISJMA@BYUVM.BITNET`>, William J. Hamblin <`HISWJH@BYUVM.BITNET`>, or David C. Wright <`WRIGHT@HUSC3`>.